

[00:00:00] <music>

**Annie:** Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm really happy to be here with you today. We have got a great show in store.

And well, we've only got two more stops on the That Sounds Fun Tour, but I am stoked about the two we have left. I hope I get to see you tonight in Phoenix, actually in Mesa, or Wednesday in Denver, actually Aurora. But I would love to see you guys at those shows. We have a few seats left at both.

I cannot believe this tour is coming to a close. I've loved every second of it and cannot wait for these last few shows. So pop over to [anniefdowns.com/events](http://anniefdowns.com/events) and grab your last-minute tickets.

And you may remember that earlier this year we did a podcast listener survey after the epiphany episode. And one of the things that you all said you're interested in hearing more about is prayer. Me too. So we're excited to let you know that we're going to spend the entire month of April, aside from Holy Week, focused on prayer.

We'll hear from some different wise voices about various practices of prayer. But one of the things I'm most excited about is we're going to do another That Sounds Fun Q&A all about prayer. And that's where we need your help. We want to know what questions you'd like to explore about prayer.

Just visit the link in the show notes to submit your questions about prayer. Okay? Again, they're down in the show notes. There's a link right there. Just send us your questions. I cannot wait for us all to get to learn and grow together in April.

But before we dive into today's conversation, I want to take a moment and share about one of our incredible partners, [Athletic Greens](#). We talk a lot around here about how to become the healthiest version of ourselves, body, mind, and spirit. And well, Athletic Greens is definitely something that supports my physical health.

When you drink one scoop of Athletic Greens mixed into a glass of cold water, you're absorbing 75 high quality vitamins, minerals, whole foods sourced superfoods, probiotics, and adaptogens to help you start your day right. At least that's when I like to use it as part of my morning routine.

This special blend of ingredients supports your gut health, your nervous system, immune system, energy level, and your ability to focus. That is quite a list. I like

this amplifies all the needed vitamins, minerals, and supplements into one easy step. And it tastes good—a lot like a green juice with a tropical flavor to it.

Athletic Greens is lifestyle friendly. So if you eat keto or paleo or vegan, dairy-free, or gluten-free, you're all good. And it costs you less than \$3 a day. So it's an investment you're making in your health that's cheaper than having a daily fancy coffee habit or fancy tea habit as I do.

Right now it's time to reclaim your health and arm your immune system with convenient daily nutrition, especially since we're still in the middle of cold and flu season. Just one scoop in a cup of cold water every day, and that is it. No need for a million different pills and supplements to look out for your health.

To make it easy, Athletic Greens is going to give you a free one-year supply of immune-supporting vitamin D and five free travel packs with your first purchase. All you have to do is visit [Athleticgreens.com/soundsfun](https://athleticgreens.com/soundsfun). Again, that's [athleticgreens.com/soundsfun](https://athleticgreens.com/soundsfun) to take ownership over your health and pick up the ultimate daily nutritional insurance.

Along with our prayer Q&A link, that link and all of our partner links are always in our show notes below and on [Anniefdowns.com/podcast](https://anniefdowns.com/podcast).

**Intro:** Today on the show I get to talk with one of the most often requested guests. I mean, y'all love hearing from this guy. And I do too. My friend Ben Rector is back with us today. You can go back and listen to him on Episode 130. But today he is here talking about his new album that releases this week on Friday. It's called *The Joy of Music*.

It features collabs with Snoop Dogg, Kenny G, Dave Koz, and Taylor Goldsmith from Dawes. Ben is a fantastic singer/songwriter and an all-around stand-up guy. I just adore him and his family. Y'all this episode is so good. This conversation is so good. And this new album is so good. You're going to love it. Bens had so much fun stuff going on around this release. I cannot wait for you to hear all about it.

So here's my conversation with Ben Rector.

**[00:04:15] <music>**

**Annie:** Ben, my first question, as we're talking about our headphones, you have one on, one-off. I'm concerned about my hearing.

**Ben:** I'm too.

**Annie:** Okay, mine or about yours?

**Ben:** Mostly about mine. But I could be concerned about... I've been concerned about everybody's.

**Annie:** Thank you. I noticed this morning when I got in my car that when the podcast started my volume was at max in my car.

**Ben:** Oh.

**Annie:** And it wasn't a problem.

**Ben:** Yeah, that's an issue.

**Annie:** I know.

**Ben:** My car has a weird... like right where I want to listen to music, it will auto turn it down a little bit. And if you turn it up past that, it will keep it there but it's too loud. So I almost just want to be like you think you're protecting my hearing but really you're just making me turn it up little too loud. It's like volume seven and a half it'll like go back down to six and a half. But if you go up to like eight and a half, it just leaves it there.

**Annie:** I wonder if it's because you and I both naturally use our voices all the time. And my voice naturally is loud.

**Ben:** My singing voice is loud.

**Annie:** Is it because we've lived with our loud voices for 30 something plus years?

**Ben:** I don't know. I don't know. But I've started to think about it in my old age.

**Annie:** I know. What are we supposed to do? Are we supposed to go to an ear doctor like we go to an eye doctor?

**Ben:** I don't think there's anything to be done. I think they're just going to say, don't be around as much loud stuff.

**Annie:** And what can we do about that? I live with myself.

**Ben:** I try to keep in-ears reasonably quiet on stage.

**Annie:** Oh, do you?

**Ben:** I try to be conscious of that. But I mean, it's pretty loud.

**Annie:** Because the in-ear, this is the thing I don't know. Because when we're doing the podcast tour, I don't have in-ears because I'm just talking. And when I speak I don't have in-ears.

**Ben:** They are awful.

**Annie:** Are they awful?

**Ben:** Yeah, they are terrible.

**Annie:** Why?

**Ben:** It's like someone putting VR goggles on you to see. It's just disorienting.

**Annie:** Is that why we see people take them out sometimes when the crowd sings along? Because they want to hear the crowd?

**Ben:** Well, yeah. It's pretty disorienting. It's like you've stopped being able to use one of your senses and it's coming through an unnatural source, and it's blocking out all-natural sound. You don't realize how much you're used to hearing your voice with a little bit of air and a little bit of space. And then all of a sudden, you're just hearing a very direct sound from it. They're not great. I don't know any singers that are like, "Boy, do I love in-ears!"

**Annie:** And they're there to help you hear why? Tell me why.

**Ben:** I wish everyone should be able to do this, to come up on stage during a concert. Because it sounds nothing like it sounds out front. It's super strange. So, basically, you have to be able to hear the sounds you're making, whether you're a drummer, or a bassist or singer, whatever. And so you can use what's called wedges. They're like speakers on the floor. Most people would know what those are.

**Annie:** That point back at the stage.

**Ben:** Yes, so you can hear yourself. But as shows get bigger, you kind of need to use in-ear monitors because you're also hearing stuff like the click and count ins, and you can't have that coming out of speakers because everybody will hear it.

**Annie:** Oh, sure.

**Ben:** And honestly, when you get into bigger spaces, it's just a little bit harder for wedges to do a good job because there's just a lot of sound bouncing around. So basically, you're trying to remove all of the kick off in this crazy sound and just hear what you need to. But in doing that, it's pretty unnatural.

**Annie:** So in your in-ears during a show, when we come to this tour this summer, what you are hearing is everybody on stage?

**Ben:** And that's the deal. The bummer is, if you're a singer, that takes up a ton of real estate in your in-ears to be able to hear the nuances of your voice and control it, you'd have it pretty loud. So my in-ear mix is not-

**Annie:** You just hear you?

**Ben:** No. We're getting deep here.

**Annie:** I know. Sorry.

**Ben:** I have a lot of the click. Because if I wasn't singing, I'd be able to have a lot of drums, a lot of bass, a lot of everything. And really it's utilitarian. It's like I need to hear where I am rhythmically. And like the drums, if you look at the drum set, there's like, I don't know, 10 microphones on it. And that ends up being kind of noisy, and there's a lot of stuff you don't necessarily need to hear.

So I have a lot of clicks, a lot of my voice, and whatever instrument playing, and a little bit of everything else. So it's not a fun mix to listen to. But if I did a fun mix to listen to, I wouldn't be able to control what I was doing enough. Like, if you're listening to a record, you can just take it in. But if you're like controlling your voice within the record, your voice needs to be really loud so you can hear it.

**Annie:** Wow. So your experience and our experience of a Ben Rector show are incredibly different?

**Ben:** Fundamentally different.

**Annie:** Wild. I think I always assumed when I saw people with in-ears that the balance in their head was every instrument, they just heard all the instruments.

**Ben:** It's tweaked to whatever you want it to be.

**Annie:** It's wild.

**Ben:** I would like to listen to all the instruments loud, but I just don't have enough real estate. If I turned them all up, I couldn't hear myself. And for the fans there, they want to hear me do a good job. So I need to have a lot of click and a lot of myself.

**Annie:** Is it you and I who have talked about this before? I think it may have been. The interesting thing about your job versus my job is when people show up to hear me, every time they want it to be brand new. They don't ever want to hear me repeat anything.

**Ben:** Wow.

**Annie:** Right? I mean, people are even asking me, Annie, are you going to be doing the same talk on the spring tour that you did last summer? But when you show up, I want you to sound the album.

**Ben:** They want to hear it just the way it is. Which honestly is great. Although the older I get the more I'm like, "Oh, it sounds exciting to do something new." But I never want to be the guy that's like, "I'm not going to play whatever song you want me to play."

**Annie:** Uh-huh, yeah. Have you ever done a show where you played through an album front to back.

**Ben:** Never done that. And honestly, that'd be fun. I feel like I want to do more stuff like that. But I feel like touring is kind of a... It's like a whole machine for me now. So I haven't had a ton of bandwidth to do just fun random stuff. It's usually like, "Okay, we got to go do the album release tour, etc."

**Annie:** Last time we talked was Christmas of 2020—not you and I, but on the podcast—was Christmas 2020 and we were both at home.

**Ben:** Wow.

**Annie:** How different is it? When you're thinking about *The Joy of Music* album coming out in the tour, how different do you feel thinking about touring now that we've had the time off?

**Ben:** It makes me more excited to go do it again. And I think touring is always an intense experience for me. Partially because I picked the funny job for this. But I don't always love performing. There's parts of it that I love but I'm not like, "Just get me up there."

But I think I'm so excited about the record. I'm so excited. It feels like a communal experience to me. And so I think I'm really excited to get out and get to do that again. I think that is exciting to me. And honestly, my life has been so just like... it's like a closed loop. It's like a routine that I'm just doing the same thing that it's like, "Oh, doing something different. That sounds interesting."

Right now we're in the throes of putting the band and crew together and availability and all that kind of stuff. But it makes me excited to do it. It really does.

**Annie:** And *The Joy of Music*, I mean, you have Snoop Dogg on this.

**Ben:** I know.

**Annie:** I mean, Ben, tell me about that phone call. Somewhere you're sitting in your house and you're like, "You know who'd be great on this song is Snoop Dogg." And then you're like, "Who's the first call?" Do you have his number?

**Ben:** I don't.

**Annie:** Okay.

**Ben:** I have, I think, his manager's number.

**Annie:** Okay. Did you already?

**Ben:** No. Basically, I made a record before the pandemic hit that I thought it was going to be... I made like seven songs. And I was like, "This is going to be my record." And then as soon as the pandemic hit, I started kind of writing again with no agenda-

**Annie:** Wow.

**Ben:** ...and essentially rewrote the whole album.

**Annie:** So those first seven-

**Ben:** I think two of them made the record. But so 11 other songs. I think 11.

**Annie:** Ben!

**Ben:** So I was writing and creating from a place of just like I want to do what sounds fun again, and what feels inspired. Because for the first time I didn't have any deadlines. There was no like, "Yeah, but I gotta go play the show."

So with the features on the album, I literally was just like, "What sounds fun? Let's do that." So we got Kenny G first. It was crazy. We had a saxophone part and I was like, "What if we got Kenny G to do this?"

**Annie:** You just were like dreaming?

**Ben:** Yeah. And then he was like, "Yeah, great, let's do it." So that kept happening. So when I started working on that song, *Sunday*, I immediately was just like, "Snoop Dogg has to be on the song." I'm a pessimist by nature. Always have been. I feel like people are surprised by that but that is the way I am.

**Annie:** Introverted pessimists.

**Ben:** Yes. And for whatever reason, many things on this album, I've just been like, "That's going to work out. That needs to work."

**Annie:** Really?

**Ben:** Yeah, 100%.

**Annie:** Ben!

**Ben:** And so I called my manager, Greg, and I was like, "We got to get Snoop Dogg on this song." And he's like, "Okay, I'll see if I can find Snoop Dogg."

**Annie:** Greg!

**Ben:** It was a saga, it was a lot of twists and turns, but Snoop Dogg is on the album with me. We're kind of like rapping back and forth, which is hilarious. But yeah. So we



found Kevin, who I guess is involved with Snoop Dogg and I think a day-to-day manager capacity, we talked back and forth a lot.

And then it was a bit of a saga Snoop recording the part. It was while him and Kevin Hart were doing the Olympics. And so it took him a little longer than normal to do it because he was having to get up-

**Annie:** He had like a day job.

**Ben:** Yeah. I think he was getting up at five to do that.

**Annie:** Oh, my gosh.

**Ben:** So Kevin.

**Annie:** Thank God he did. That was so funny.

**Ben:** Oh, it was great.

**Annie:** Oh my gosh, I loved it.

**Ben:** What was happening is like, "He's not going to do this." The New York Times had just done a piece about him, I was like, "There's no way that he's going to actually be like, 'Yeah, I want to do this song with Ben Rector, this guy I've never heard of.'"

**Annie:** Has he never heard of you?

**Ben:** I have no idea. But basically the gauntlet was Kevin was like, "Cool song. First things first, I got to show it to Snoop, see if he wants to do it." And of course, in my newfound optimism, it was like, "He's totally going to want to do it." And he did. He wanted to do it. And then we had to work out the financial arrangement which is hilarious. Then I think-

**Annie:** Right. Because at some point you're laying down in bed at night, you're like, "The number one thing I worked on today was how to pay Snoop Dogg."

**Ben:** Oh, yeah.

**Annie:** That is wild.

**Ben:** Yeah, truly. But honestly, he did a great job. I asked him to do this intro, he did it. It was really hilarious. And every time I've heard that song since, it blows my mind. It blows my ninth-grade mind. And then Jane has known about it for a long time and doesn't understand that it's cool-

**Annie:** Your daughter Jane?

**Ben:** Yes.

**Annie:** Yes, just for everybody. She's five?

**Ben:** She's four. She will be five in July. I'm listening to mixes and stuff, so she's like learning the songs. And she'll tell people occasionally, she's like, "My dad has this new funny guy, Snoop, on a song." Hillary was like, "Can she tell people that?" I was like, "No one's going to believe her." So I'm like, "Sure." So she's telling everyone in school because she's always like, "This new funny guy, Snoop." And I was like, "Not new. He's kind of funny."

**Annie:** "But yeah, go tell your friends. It's fine with me."

**Ben:** So all of the people who are on the record with me have been so much fun to work with. And honestly, it's just a dream. I started realizing I should just do stuff that sounds interesting and literally just for fun. Because I think for a long time, I was like, "Oh, fun isn't important enough. I have to do a good job of this. I can't mess it up."

And then I'm just like, "Hey..." I started getting worried that I was going to look back when I was 60 and not be as worried about if I failed or not, but would be more worried about like, "Dude, you were stressed out your whole adult life with this really cool job. You got to figure out a way to enjoy this." So on this record, I was like, "I'm going to enjoy this." So here we are.

**Annie:** I forgot to ask you if you want water or coffee or anything.

**Ben:** I'm great.

**Annie:** What would you like?

**Ben:** I stopped drinking coffee.

**Annie:** What?

**Ben:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Well, go there. What?

**Ben:** I didn't realize how anxious it made me. And I'm like a kind of anxious person anyways, but I didn't realize the extra heat it was putting on the anxiety. Actually, Tim [Shaw?] told me on to it. He was like, "I stopped drinking coffee." I think he took like magnesium or something. I don't know.

**Annie:** At night.

**Ben:** Yeah. Sometimes I have trouble sleeping and whatever.

**Annie:** While you're like paying Snoop Dogg there's a lot to think about.

**Ben:** Lots going on. But he was like, "You should try to not drink coffee." So I stopped. And not a joke, a week in, I was actually sad about how much better I felt because I was like, "Nobody told me for 10 years I was like taking drugs." And no one was like, "Hey..." I think it's not like that for most people. I think most people are just like, "This is delicious. I love it." And I miss it but I do feel a lot more just level or at peace now, which is great, but I miss coffee a lot. I drink tea in the morning.

**Annie:** What kind of tea did you switch to?

**Ben:** I drink like Earl Grey and English breakfast. It still does have caffeine but it just doesn't hit. It's not as much. It doesn't hit me quite hard.

**Annie:** You know I'm the same. I quit coffee in 2007...

**Ben:** Oh, really? Wow.

**Annie:** ...for the exact same. So I'm a tea person.

**Ben:** What do you drink?

**Annie:** English breakfast.

**Ben:** What kind?

**Annie:** Twinings is mine right now.

**Ben:** I didn't like that it comes in little packets. It stresses me out.

**Annie:** What would you rather? You want to do the looseleaf?

**Ben:** I do looseleaf a little bit but I like when it comes all together, not individually wrapped. It makes me feel like I'm not at a hotel. It's just like, Yeah, I got a big any of these.

**Annie:** Yeah, you're exactly right. Where you can open the box and the bags are not individually wrapped, they're in there together.

**Ben:** It makes you feel like I'm a real tea person.

**Annie:** Well, you know, I'm going to Scotland next month. I will get you...

**Ben:** Wow.

**Annie:** Do you like English breakfast or Earl Grey better?

**Ben:** It's kind of a tie. I'm still kind of like exploring-

**Annie:** Because you haven't been a tea guy since you could go to England and get tea, right?

**Ben:** Oh, no, I mean, I'm a recent tea convert.

**Annie:** I will help. I will bring you-

**Ben:** Okay, great. Awesome.

**Annie:** I will put a third of my suitcase will be tea fixed for us.

**Ben:** Oh, love it. Awesome.

**Annie:** Because it matters so much to me.

**Ben:** Great. I do it every day and I miss coffee still.

**Annie:** I do too. And it's been since 2007. So I mean, decades and I still miss it.

**Ben:** I call it the devil's been. Sometimes I'm like, "It sounds good. I just want a little bit." Like this week I had like a tiny bit. It feels different. It feels like someone plugged me in or something.

**Annie:** I started putting a shot of espresso in my Chai at Starbucks just for fun and I started having panic attacks.

**Ben:** 100%.

**Annie:** And I didn't know why. I mean, I was at a speaking event, I couldn't get off the car, man.

**Ben:** I really feel like I need to do a PSA because I feel like everybody's kind of anxious and I just want to buy a billboard and be like, "If you're kind of anxious and you're drinking coffee, stop." I think I would have thought that sounded crazy or overkill, and I want to be like, it's not. I wish I could get like eight of those years back and be like, "Oh, you were like 25% more stressed out all the time than you needed to be."

**Annie:** Were you drinking a lot?

**Ben:** No. I had maybe like a cup. I would drink espresso and stuff but I wasn't like crushing coffee. It was just not helpful for me. And I wish I knew that. Because I think people are just like, Oh yeah, maybe it makes you jittery," and it's like, it didn't make me jittery, it made me kind of crazy.

**Annie:** Yeah, literally it affected my emotions.

**Ben:** Yeah, totally.

**Annie:** Have you done a London Fog yet at coffee shop?

**Ben:** No.

**Annie:** That's my go-to at a coffee shop if I don't want Chai. Because it is Earl Grey or you can tell them to try it out. And then they steam the milk. Whatever kind of milk.

**Ben:** I have never gotten into milk and tea.

**Annie:** Oh, so you're a purist with tea?

**Ben:** Straight up, yeah.

**Annie:** Do you put sugar in or anything?

**Ben:** No.

**Annie:** You put a bag of tea and water?

**Ben:** Hundo P!

**Annie:** Wow, that is... Ben, that is so intense.

**Ben:** I kind of like an efficiency quirk. And it feels inefficient to me to drink milk or cream and things in the morning.

**Annie:** Okay. So you're just going a straight bag of tea. You really need British tea because you need the best stuff.

**Ben:** Yeah. And I've scoured a little bit but I'd love any assistance.

**Annie:** I'll just bring you back some and see what you like.

**Ben:** That's great. Sounds great.

**Annie:** The thing I also miss that I wish... This is us kind of brainstorming an invention. When you drink coffee you can set it to be ready when you wake up.

**Ben:** Oh, yeah.

**Annie:** And there isn't a tea version of that.

**Ben:** You do kettle?

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Ben:** Yeah, I do a kettle.

**Annie:** I do a kettle. So there isn't a machine. I've looked. There isn't a machine that will brew tea for you.

**Ben:** It's really good idea actually.

**Annie:** Thank you. Trademark, don't let anybody steal it. It's Ben and Annie's.

**Ben:** Done. Really it's just yours.

**Annie:** But I brought you into it.

**Ben:** This is a co-right.

**Annie:** This is a co-right. So you're going to get a cut because I brought you into it.

**Ben:** Okay, I love it.

**Annie:** And I feel like you have a marketing prowess that I don't, and you can get it out to the masses.

**Ben:** Okay, all right.

**Annie:** That was very enjoyable. I'm glad to know that about your tea situation.

**Ben:** Yes.

[00:21:24] <music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about another one of our incredible partners, KiwiCo. I think you all know how I feel about snow. Gracious! So you can imagine how excited I am for spring to arrive. The hours of sunlight getting longer and the weather getting warmer, yes, please.

Spring brings new curiosities and a chance for kids to connect with the world around them. There's so much opportunity to learn and it is the perfect time for new discoveries. KiwiCo delivers monthly science and art projects that celebrate a child's natural curiosity and sparks a love for lifelong learning.

With KiwiCo, kids will explore different STEAM topics each month, ranging from rainbows, rocket ships and everything in between. They have subscription lines for kids of all ages. And some of my older MiniBFF, like in the 10 to 12-year-old range, were showing me this messenger bag they got to dye. It was so pretty and they were so proud of it.

Your child can get super cool hands on science, art, and geography projects delivered right to them every month. I bet your kids love to have mail addressed to them just as much as I love having mail addressed to me, so it's sure to be their favorite day of the month.

You'll be surprised at how high quality the materials are. But you know your girl AFD is only going to recommend awesome products to you. These are real engineering, science, and art projects for your kids. Step into spring and celebrate the season of discovery with the KiwiCo subscription.

Get that 30% off your first month plus free shipping on any crate line with a code THATSOUNDSFUN at [kiwico.com](http://kiwico.com). That's 30% off your first month at [kiwico.com](http://kiwico.com), promo code: THATSOUNDSFUN.

**Sponsor:** And I've got one more amazing partner to tell you about, [Ritual](http://Ritual). So here's the thing we know. The nutrition provided by the typical American food intake has got some serious gaps. Over 97% of women ages 19 to 50 aren't getting enough vitamin D and 95% are not getting the recommended daily intake of key Omega 3s.

Rituals Essential for Women 18+ multivitamin was formulated by exhaustive research to help fill nutrient gaps in the diets of women ages 18 plus. It's formulated with nutrients to help support brain health, which we need, bone health, which we need, blood health, and antioxidant support. We also need these things.

But Ritual didn't stop there. They invested in a gold standard University-led clinical trial to prove the impact of Essential for Women 18+ multivitamin. What they found was that their Essentials for Women 18+ was shown to increase vitamin D levels by 43% and Omega 3, DHA levels by 41% in 12 weeks. That is impressive.

Ritual is committed to third party testing to include traceable and vegan-friendly ingredients. And they're always making sure their communication is clear. My Ritual multivitamins are a part of my daily morning routine. Y'all know I love that minty tab. So they taste good and they smell good. And I love knowing that their clean ingredients are helping me make sure my body gets what it needs that I'm not necessarily getting from what I eat.

Right now Ritual is offering my friends 10% off your first three months. So visit [ritual.com/thatsoundsfun](http://ritual.com/thatsoundsfun) and turn healthy habits into a ritual. That's 10% off at [ritual.com/thatsoundsfun](http://ritual.com/thatsoundsfun).

And now back to my conversation with Ben.



[00:24:35] <music>

**Annie:** You said I've decided to do what sounds fun. Obviously, that matters to us here.

**Ben:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Is getting to have fun professionally a benefit of success?

**Ben:** Honestly that's the best question I've been asked in a long time. I know people that are wired to need to worry more about things. Like there are friends of mine who they're like, "What should I do with my artistry?" I'd be like, "You need to stress out a little more about this. You need to write more songs than this or you need to whatever."

And so I would say I would give this... not that this is advice. I would give this thought with this asterisk. I have always worried too much about stuff. It is definitely you're in more of a position to have more freedom if you've had some amount of success. And there are times when it's just like you just got to grind it out.

But I probably always would have benefited from someone telling me like, "Hey, you need to make sure you're working on and enjoying the sum." Because if my career was like the school bus, all the seats were taken up, and fun started out in the front seat. But as soon as more important things came on the bus, I just got pushed all the way out. And it's like, "Sorry, man, no room for you because this is such a rare opportunity. You could mess this up if you don't really work hard and whatever." It was just like, this is too valuable to give fun a seat.

So I think that it is a benefit or it's a little bit of a luxury where like 18-year-old me couldn't have probably been like, "I'm just going to do what's fun." But I probably would have always benefited from someone being like, "Hey, man, relax a little bit. Your extra whatever percent of worry is just not going to affect anything but your experience with this."

But there are lots of people who are wired more to like, "I just want to have fun." And to those people, I'd be like, You probably only get to really lean into that after you've done the work and you've put yourself in that position.

I would say though, at some point, whatever it is, if it's a job that some people do as a hobby, it's going to be intensely competitive. And if you don't enjoy it, you're

probably not going to be able to put the amount of time into it that you need to do it.

**Annie:** It's in 10,000 hours or whatever they say.

**Ben:** People don't look at music or creative things like this. But everything like that is just a professional sport. It's not any different than that. So it's not necessarily a competition. Like you're not having to beat anyone.

But there are infinity people who are just working very hard at this. And if you don't enjoy it to where you're just doing it all the time, then you're probably potentially not going to be able to do it professionally. To me, it's like an in-between. It's not just a luxury because I think you need to enjoy it enough to want to do it all the time, and it's not just like a grind either.

**Annie:** I think a lot of different professions were affected differently in the pandemic. One of the benefits for your profession and my profession... People are laughing right now because so many books are coming out in '21 and '22.

**Ben:** Oh, yeah.

**Annie:** I'm like, Well, yeah, we all sat home for a year and wrote.

**Ben:** Yeah, totally.

**Annie:** And y'all got to do the same thing. There was cost to us that are different than cost to doctors or nurses. But one of the benefits is we really had fun in our creative endeavors. Did that help?

**Ben:** Yeah. And honestly, to go back to the bus analogy, I didn't realize how many seats were taken up by just random like a one-off Show we have to put a band together for-

**Annie:** And do a rehearsal and run out to California.

**Ben:** I feel like if you looked at my monthly schedule, there's a few things that happen all the time. But then there's always like four or five things that are super random. You're just like, "Oh, this thing came up." And then you mix in maybe a riding trip or to go ride with people in California or whatever, or then recording, and then preparing for a tour.

And I didn't realize how little space I had in my life even in years where I was technically off, I wasn't like doing a headline tour. Those are still very full. I was traveling a ton, and I'm thinking ahead to like, What's the record going to be like or the music videos or whatever?

And for the first time, it was literally like I was grounded from all of that. And it was like, Hey, just do the work but there's not really a clock ticking for any of this. It's not like, "But in two weeks, you got to get on a plane and go do the show. Have you practiced enough for that? Does the sub drummer know the set well enough? Who's got the tracks computer?"

All of those thoughts are gone. And it's literally I would listen to music, listen through the Beatles catalog and then I would go to my writing space and write. And I have not experienced freedom like that probably since I was 18. Because I was always like, "Oh, I gotta keep this going." For the first time it was just like I'm just writing these songs not even with a place to turn them in.

**Annie:** Nobody is here waiting.

**Ben:** No. There's no way to record them. No one is playing shows. It's literally just everything is shut down. Not to say that the pandemic is a great thing because it has been awful for very many people, but for me creatively, it was a very unique experience and one, truly, that I haven't had probably since I was a teenager.

So that part of it was incredibly valuable. It reignited the records called *The Joy of Music*. I didn't think I would feel that again. And now it's like, yeah, man, I had fun on this album and got to use my experience and skill set but channel it into something that's just pure. Like there's no aim, this is just what came out.

**Annie:** A bunch of our friends sends in questions from the AFD Week in Review emails we send out, we always tell them, "Here's who's coming next week. And you can ask questions." And a lot of the questions are, you seem so excited about *The Joy of Music*?

**Ben:** Yeah, I really am.

**Annie:** I have never felt like you weren't excited about albums when they came out. You always have like a here's why it matters to me. But this one feels like joy.

**Ben:** No, exactly. And I think that's just because I'm proud of the album. I've never made anything that I wasn't proud of but I had more asterisks in my head of like, "I don't

know if that's all the way there. I wish I'd done this differently or whatever." And for the first time, the kind of that thing I said earlier about the whole record cycle, I've just had this weird feeling of like, "I think it's going to work."

I don't even know what that means exactly. But always before, I would want to... If I met somebody and they were like, "Listened to your new album," I'd have a bunch of excuses that I needed to make. "Well, the mix on this one or whatever." And on this one, I'll just be like, "Just listen to it. I think it's awesome."

And that's the first time I felt like that. I don't know if that's about the actual quality of the music or the experience that had making it. I think it's probably a little both. But I really feel like it's the first one that I would just be like, No caveat. Just listen to the whole thing." And I really think it's great. And not in a like "because I'm so great" way. But just like for the first time I'm just excited to share it with people because I think it's a good thing to put in the world.

**Annie:** Do things feel different with God on this one?

**Ben:** I think it just feels like a little... I don't know if it's as different on that level. I think it's just there's less clutter in whatever... I mean, I think everything is kind of spiritual but music for the first time just felt uncomplicated. So I think that that probably clears room for a lot of things.

And honestly there's a song on the album that is probably my most, I guess, spiritual or religious song so far. And some of that too I think I'm approaching this record differently just like from a place of gratitude. I feel like the older I get the more that I feel, to be totally honest, kind of far away from the faith that I felt at 15 or something.

**Annie:** Of course.

**Ben:** But I also feel like still kind of grounded in it in a probably a lot more open sense. I'm sure listeners are like, "Oh, no. Are we losing you?"

**Annie:** Oh my gosh, not at all. Oh, no, Ben.

**Ben:** I feel like the whole record probably came from a place of gratitude. And I think that that is grounded in faith for me. So I think I felt the freedom to go to that place and other places. I think it's probably just the first time that I've actually had to stop for long enough to realize that there's so much to be thankful for.

And I think it's a different feeling... You know, it's like you're running a marathon, someone's like, "Aren't you glad about this marathon?" And before I would be like, "I mean, yeah, but I'm pretty tired also." I'm running fast and far and it feels like for the first time I stopped running. And someone's like, "Hey, aren't you glad about this?" I'm like, "Wow, I really am. I'm so thankful for the place that I'm at and my family. I think some of it was just that too was being able to have the perspective and not be in motion. So yeah.

**Annie:** That's so funny that music got uncomplicated when you added twins to your life. That is hilarious, Ben.

**Ben:** Oh my gosh.

**Annie:** When your house tripled in kid dome. It is so cute.

**Ben:** It's been a wild season. I don't know what that's about either. I think I was ready for that to wipe out my creativity in some weird way. I don't know. Maybe it grounded me more, tethered me in a good way more. Less angsty like uh and more just like, "I'm here doing this."

I feel like I lived like a monk almost for like a year. Like every day I did the same thing. I would get up, make Jane's waffles, make my tea, the twins get their bottles. Either that's Hillary or me. And then I would go out to my office at 8:30, work until lunch, come back in, eat lunch with the family, maybe make Jane lunch, go back out and work till 3. I would ride the peloton. I would get showered up. And then from like five after they woke up until night, it was like take care of the kids.

And it was just like repeat that every day. And I think I didn't realize how much maybe I also am a routine person because I've never really had one. That was nice.

**Annie:** Do you have a routine on the road though?

**Ben:** Kind of not but not really.

**Annie:** You think that'll be different for this round?

**Ben:** I will try to. You can control some of it, but you can't totally make that happen.

**Annie:** Right. Are you going to bring your peloton on the road?

**Ben:** I actually have thought about it.

**Annie:** I think you should.

**Ben:** I might. We have to take a truck this time, which I'm already like, "Oh, gosh."

**Annie:** And to everyone, he doesn't mean like a pickup truck. He means 18 wheeler.

**Ben:** A semi.

**Annie:** Yes, you have a semi. Is your face going to be on the side?

**Ben:** I hope not.

**Annie:** Oh, I hope so. My dream is to wrap one with my face.

**Ben:** Oh, man. Maybe if I had to.

**Annie:** Maybe it'll just be the joy character.

**Ben:** Honestly, that'd be sick.

**Annie:** That's so fun.

**Ben:** That's be awesome. I should ask about that. But I've got to imagine there's going to be space for a peloton in some way.

**Annie:** Tell me why the peloton has mattered so much to you?

**Ben:** Because I was able to do it even when it was cold outside. Like that part of my routine could stay the same regardless of... And when it was warm I would run and stuff. But basically, I could still control that part of it. Where I feel like if you're just doing outside and there's a long time where gyms were closed, where I couldn't go to the why. I still haven't gone back. I really want to. I've just gotten such in that rut.

But I think it's consistency. Like when it starts getting cold, I'm kind of a pansy about that. I don't like running when it's real cold. So when it's like that, I didn't have an excuse to be like, "Oh, I'll just stop running, I guess. It's like no, man, that peloton is just still sitting there."

**Annie:** I just got the treadmill.

**Ben:** you really?

**Annie:** In November. Because I got into such a habit. Last year I walked a ton and ran a ton and loved it and felt like it was a spiritual thing for me.

**Ben:** Totally.

**Annie:** And then it got cold and I was like, "Oh, I can't let this die just because I'm a wimp." And so I got a tread. And it is. I mean, I love that thing. The classes are the best.

**Ben:** I haven't done the treadmill yet. I should.

**Annie:** Yeah, you're welcome to come try it.

**Ben:** Am I?

**Annie:** It's awesome.

**Ben:** It's like the curved one, isn't it?

**Annie:** No, it ain't curved. Do they have a curved one?

**Ben:** I don't know.

**Annie:** I don't know. No, it's just a regular... I don't know if it's regular. But it does the incline and all that stuff. But there's hiking classes, running, I mean, all sorts of things.

**Ben:** I'm not a great optimizer. I don't use all the features and things. And everybody's been like, "You can do other classes. I just never have. You do like the running thing on your phone and stuff."

**Annie:** That's what I've heard. I haven't been warm enough for me to prove it. I believe them but it's still far too cold for me to prove that. I think you should bring it. That's my dream is once I could tour and bring everything I want to bring.

**Ben:** Honestly, exercise on the road is really difficult because usually you're not sleeping great. And then you're burning a lot of calories performing. And so times I've tried to be super healthy guy on the road and working out a lot. Truly, you could set a timer, two-thirds of the way through the show I'm just like gas. Even if I'm in great

shape. And so I end up feeling like, well, I can't be doing this to the detriment of the show just to be like, "But hey, I worked out a lot today." And so-

**Annie:** I'll [unintelligible 00:38:12] the one I left, but I can only do two-thirds of a show.

**Ben:** Right. So I think like trying to figure out how to do that. And then honestly, this is silly, but some places, depending on when you're touring, allergies can be real weird. So if you're like, "I'm going to go run real far," then sometimes that can mess it up. I feel like a peloton would be great because it's like, "Hey, this is not going to kill you. But you can like..."

**Annie:** You can control the environment every day.

**Ben:** Totally.

**Annie:** That's my biggest goal on the road is to make every day feel as similar as the day before. Yeah, even though I want to go to a local coffee shop, every day I want to go get a chai. Our big goal I say to people before we leave is I want us all to be healthy when we get home than when we left.

**Ben:** Honestly, that is my goal as well in all forms. And I think it is just like a tough thing to nail down. It's a really good part of the routine. I also realize you just expend so much energy singing. My grandmother once said, she was like, "I listened to someone and they said it was just like shouting for an hour." I was like, "It's exactly like that."

**Annie:** Wow. I haven't thought about that.

**Ben:** And if you're like running around too. So I don't know. I'll bring the peloton.

**Annie:** Do you have a watch that keeps your calories? Have you ever done a calorie count on a show?

**Ben:** I know John McLaughlin has done that.

**Annie:** Dave Haywood did too and showed it on Lady A's thing. I think he'd burned like 1,200 calories. It's unbelievable.

**Ben:** And honestly everybody that has done it is in that range. I think I might have worn a whoop a couple times during the show. I don't know. It is sizable. It's a real amount.



[00:39:45] <music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Shopify](#). Now that is a fun little sound. That was the sound of a sale on Shopify, the all in one commerce platform to start, run, and grow your business.

I know a bunch of us, myself included are entrepreneurs and business owners and Shopify gives us the resources that were previously big business only. So everyone from startups to established businesses can sell everywhere and synchronize online and in person sales and stay up to date on all of your numbers, which y'all know I care about.

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**Sponsor:** Here at That Sounds Fun and at the That Sounds Fun Network we love learning new things about podcasting and continuing to improve in the work that we do. And that's why we are so glad to learn about [Anchor](#).

If you haven't heard about Anchor, it's seriously the easiest way to make a podcast. Let me explain. Not only is it free, yeah, that means you paid \$0 for it, but it has

simple-to-use creation tools that allow you to record and edit your podcast right from your phone or computer.

And Anchor will distribute your podcast for you. So people will be able to hear your content on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and all the other platforms that they love listening on.

Anchor even has ways that you can monetize your podcast with no minimum number of listeners. It's everything you need to create a podcast in one place. We hear from people all the time who have great ideas and are looking for how to get their podcast started. Well, Anchor is what we use all across the That Sounds Fun Network. And we are just huge fans of how easy they make it to create a great podcast.

So just download the free Anchor app or go to [anchor.fm](https://anchor.fm) to get started. Again, that's anchor.fm or you could download the free anchor app.

And now back to finish up our conversation with Ben.

[00:42:39] <music>

**Annie:** Okay, let's talk about *The Joy of Music*.

**Ben:** Okay, great.

**Annie:** You created a character.

**Ben:** I did.

**Annie:** Why? Why is there a puppet/Muppet to go with you?

**Ben:** I don't know where it came from. I think the closest I can get... truly it was like I had a really, really weird, wild wave of creativity almost unlike I've ever had right after Christmas of... I guess it would have been last year. And I just wrote-

**Annie:** Like right at the start at '21?

**Ben:** Yes.

**Annie:** You just like had wave crash over.

**Ben:** Yeah, just crazy-

**Annie:** Really?

**Ben:** Yeah.

**Annie:** You don't know why?

**Ben:** No.

**Annie:** Ben!

**Ben:** I wrote a lot of songs at once. And every songwriter has waves like that but this is just a really strange one. One of the songs out right now called *Supernatural* and I remember being like, "I gotta make a video for this and it's got to have dancing." I'm terrified of dancing. Like mortified do that. I was like, "I probably need to learn how to dance to do this."

And then I don't remember how the other piece is but it was truly like a fever dream. I sent Greg an email that was like five pages long that was essentially the treatment for the short film and I was like "We have to do this." And he was like, "Okay, let's figure it out."

And somewhere in there, the idea for joy came about. We haven't totally explained it yet. Kind of the short film really explains it. I'll do my best right here. And I think you'll get what I'm saying. Hopefully, the listeners do, too.

Had this idea for kind of like a giant like Muppet monster. We talked to Jim Henson's Creature Shop who make the Muppets in Sesame Street and like all of the crazy creatures you see in films. And they were like, "We could do it, but it's really expensive. And so I tried to find somebody else and found some other people, didn't really work. And so we went back to Henson and we're like, "We want to do this."

**Annie:** You called Jim Henson or his office and Snoop Dogg in this album?

**Ben:** Yeah, I know. If you told me that a few years ago, I'd be like, "Did I get into drugs or something?"

**Annie:** That's right. Wow. So you called them back.

**Ben:** Called the people back and we started... I had sent them some sketches that I had done. They had their artists do sketches. He's incredible. We picked and we started honing in on kind of that character, just like building it. I went to New York to give notes.

And this part is a little believable, but you got to suspend your disbelief to enter *The Joy of Music* with me. We're very close to the end of it and it's really clunky and they're like, "You're never going to believe this but there's a guy who looks just like this. And he lives in Nashville." Like, "Are you kidding?"

**Annie:** What?

**Ben:** Like, "Yeah. His name is Joy. Can't believe you haven't run into him yet. He's huge." And I was like, "Why didn't you just tell me this at the beginning of this crazy project.

**Annie:** Had I known I could just meet someone.

**Ben:** And I guess the deal was joy had contacted them saying, "I want to be in the Muppets." And they're like, "You can't be in the Muppets. We make the Muppets." It's worked out well. So Joy now stars in the short film with me. He's actually staying at my house right now, which is really cool.

**Annie:** Oh, great. I bet the kids love him.

**Ben:** Yeah, they do. Jane is still a little bit... He's-

**Annie:** The boys, though, were like, "I'm in."

**Ben:** He cannot fit through a doorway. When they were making the first iteration of Joy, I was like, "Tell me what I can still change because I don't want to give you feedback that you can't change." And they were like, "Well, you can't change how big it is." And I had asked it to be really big. And I got there. Like you and I could not put our arms around it.

**Annie:** And the pictures of you with joy, it is bigger than three people around it.

**Ben:** Oh, for sure. I'm not like a large person. but I'm larger than people think I am. I'm probably like 6'2. Joy dwarfs me in all ways. He's very large.

**Annie:** Why did y'all make the short film? What's that?

**Ben:** I don't know. I think it started out kind of being like, "These will be the music videos." They had kind of started to be like a narrative arc. And I'll share the narrative arc here. Basically, the idea is kind of a metaphor for the pandemic, but I'm like working on the first song, *Dream On*, and I fall asleep, but I don't know I'm asleep. And then Joy is in this house with me and I just freaked out, like, "What is going on?" And enter a dream world with Joy, where he kind of shepherds me through like me rediscovering gratitude in the joy of music.

And I wake back up in the same place that I fell asleep at the end of the film. And there's a miniature joy that Jane has left me and she's like... Basically, that's why it's in my head. I was like, "Oh my gosh, this is Jane's toy all along and the giant version of it was my dream.

And then I have rediscovered the joy of music and ready to go out into the world and share that with people. But that really is just a metaphor for the pandemic, which is basically everybody kind of stopped, fell asleep. And I sort of rediscovered something that is really special to me and kind of I'm coming out of that with a different perspective. And I'm just excited to go do it.

I don't remember why I was like, "We're making the short film." It would just kind of like built on itself. I was like, "This could be the video for *Dream On* and this could be *Supernatural* and this could be *Best Life*. And we looked up and it was like, "Oh, so it's essentially the first six songs of the record in order and then the last song of the record all have essentially a chapter, a music video. And together it's like one narrative.

**Annie:** This is incredible.

**Ben:** It's wild. It really is.

**Annie:** It is like so many different pieces of one piece of art.

**Ben:** Yeah, it is. It really is.

**Annie:** Ben, that's awesome.

**Ben:** And I'm actually nervous for the first time because instead of guarding my like, "I don't know if this is going to go well," I'm like, "I really think it's going to go well," which is a more vulnerable place for me.

**Annie:** Yes.

**Ben:** Because there's no like... In golf you joke about if you had a good t-shirt and you're playing with people, sometimes you'd be like, "Yeah, that was a little toey ally being like, "I could have hit it farther."

And this is the first record that's like I hit that as far as I could. And we made this crazy short film, and it's really good and now you're like, Oh, man, I don't know what this means but I hope it gets its due." I hope people are like, "This is such a great piece of art." Because before it was always like, "Well, you know, there's a little toey. I didn't hit as hard as I could." Now it's like, "No, I smashed this." So I hope it goes good. You know what I mean?

**Annie:** How can people see the film?

**Ben:** It's not out yet. It will come out after the record is out.

**Annie:** Oh, good.

**Ben:** It'll be on YouTube chapter by chapter. We're still trying to figure... I just want to put it up as the whole film because... I don't know. But we might do more screenings, but-

**Annie:** The screenings here, people lost their mind.

**Ben:** It was awesome. And it made me want to do more of them. But then also we're doing the tour. So I don't know if we want to sell tickets to a thing that's not the tour for the tour. I don't know.

**Annie:** Yeah, certainly. Certainly. So the singles that are out, *Living my Best Life*, *Dream On*, *Supernatural*, you did hit as far as I've ever seen.

**Ben:** Awesome. Thanks so much. Thank you

**Annie:** I want you to hear me say that.

**Ben:** Great. That makes me feel good.

**Annie:** It's incredible.

**Ben:** Thank you.

**Annie:** Is this album one that we listen to front to back?

**Ben:** 100%.

**Annie:** Every song is in its place on purpose?

**Ben:** There are people who have been like, "Are those the best three songs?" I'm like, "I don't think any of those are the best. I don't think those three are in the top of the album." I just think it's really good. And I'm not going to be like, "You have to listen to it start to say to finish."

**Annie:** I am going to say that to people.

**Ben:** Okay, great. I think you should because I feel like there was a period of time when people made albums where every song was good and you should listen to it. And then it kind of grew into this thing where it's like, Two songs are good, and everything else is not good.

I feel really strongly that this is an album that it's like, Hey, all these songs are as good as each other. It's not like the best three are up top, downhill from there. I'm so interested to see what songs people gravitate towards because to me it's not like, "Well, probably this one." I don't know. I think they're good. I don't know.

**Annie:** What will success look like to you?

**Ben:** I've tried so hard to define that and I really don't know.

**Annie:** I just don't want you to miss it if it happened.

**Ben:** I know. And that's my thing. It's like I don't know what this record working quote-unquote looks like. I really don't. And this is not like self-preservation or anything. It's I really don't. I think it's going to be one of the best albums this year but I don't know what, quote-unquote success looks like. Because the music industry is rapidly changing. It's just more fragmented than it ever used to be. And so it's not as clear cut of like, yeah, this is what a record like this could or should do.

**Annie:** Sure.

**Ben:** I would like it to like, you know, 20 years ago everybody watched *Friends*. And now, as close as you can get to ubiquity with TV shows is like, do you watch *Succession*? It's like, I mean, 1 in 10 of your friends does. And it's like the biggest show right now. It's not like we're watching NBC anymore. It's like you're watching one of eight streaming services, or maybe some online thing.

And so because of that—I mean, music is no different—I don't have a clear “this is what success will be for me on this record.” Because everything feels so ambiguous now. If it was like 20 years ago, I'd be like, I want to win Best New Artist at the Grammys or something. But it just doesn't really work like that anymore. And there's still that award but the path to that is way different than it used to be.

So I think the best I could put it is I would love to have a moment again. I think I'm just like, I think this is great. I hope people think it's awesome. But honestly, after this, I should go write down what success would look like because I think it would be easy for it to kind of pass you by.

Already I've never gotten great play listing on DSPs. That's like Spotify, Apple Music, or whatever. I'm kind of in a weird playlist gap where it's like, I'm pop music, but not like pop pop. And I'm not like totally a niche thing but like kind of am.

**Annie:** You're not quite singer/songwriter, you're way more pop. That's interesting.

**Ben:** I've kind of existed in between of those things. And so for the first time on the first couple songs, they got great playlists in Spotify. I was like, "Oh my gosh, this is awesome." And instead of just celebrating that immediately, I was like, "Why are they standing that position on the playlist? Is this going okay." I was like, "Oh, man, this is something that I've wanted for a long time. Now I have it, and instead of being like, "High five," I'm just like, "Well, okay, now what?"

**Annie:** You got to have fun in this part.

**Ben:** Totally. I don't want to do that. Because making the album was so much fun and making things to me is really fun. And then the watching and waiting, not as much fun. So I should do a good job of defining success because if I don't, I'm worried I'll look up and be like, "Was it good? I don't know."

**Annie:** Have you been nominated for a Grammy?

**Ben:** No, I haven't.



**Annie:** Okay.

**Ben:** I need to make music for a smaller pool. I feel like I'd have a better shot if I made like Americana music or folk music. That's a pool that I could fit in a little better. I mean, the level of music there is incredibly high. There's just fewer entrants.

**Annie:** And like any category that I would be nominated for, it's like me and like Dua Lipa. Or me and DaBaby.

**Annie:** No, it's true.

**Ben:** I'm not going to probably be very competitive in that sense. So it is. I think if my whole goal was I just want to be nominated for a Grammy, I would probably have to aim differently. I mean, maybe this record has just exploded, it'd be like, "Yeah, sure." But there's not a lot of music that sounds like my music that is crushing in those formats. It's like a little bit of an in-between so.

**Annie:** And there's so much that normal people like me don't know about the politics of record labels and who gets nominated and how and who votes. It's all messier than just what was the best album this year.

**Ben:** Oh, totally. Totally. Yeah, yeah.

**Annie:** I will give you an award.

**Ben:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

**Annie:** I mean, I don't know what it'll count for but I do own [Thatsoundsfunawards.com](http://Thatsoundsfunawards.com).

**Ben:** Oh, great.

**Annie:** Here's what I've learned. It's cool to win, it's way cooler to give them.

**Ben:** Yeah. I mean, already, I think that the—and I know this—but if you're looking for specific achievements, that just never works out the way you want it to.

**Annie:** I've never won an award. I've lost every time I've been nominated. But I never walk away being like, "Oh, that felt just like I thought it was going to feel."

**Ben:** No. Any milestones so far for me, there's like, "I never thought this would happen," and then it happens. It's just as good as it gets. It's crazy. But it is never the true feeling of like you did it. That's never come from any mile marker or achievement so far from me. And the best that ever gets is a little bit of good flow state while you're working on it. That's the best that it gets. And I wish I could tell my younger self that. I tell myself now that.

And that's why when you're like, "What would success look like?" I want to define it because I already know really and truly 100% in the core of my being if it's like, "Hey, Ben, you won (fill in the blank) award, I know what that's going to feel like. Really great for an evening and then it's going to be like, Okay, but this guy or this girl's got, I don't know, they sold out 12 nights at whatever place they're playing. And then, I mean, we'll come on, like you too is telling out football. There's always going to be no-

**Annie:** There's not top of the mountain.

**Ben:** No, there's not.

**Annie:** There no. Yeah.

**Ben:** And so on that level, I should figure this out because part of my job now is like, hey, continue to operate from a place of joy. And don't be like, Oh. You know what I mean?

**Annie:** We have been friends for over a decade-

**Ben:** Crazy.

**Annie:** ...and I've never seen you release an album with this much peace.

**Ben:** Oh, wow. That makes you feel good.

**Annie:** I mean, I've never noticed it was not that.

**Ben:** Sure.

**Annie:** Do you know what I mean?

**Ben:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Annie:** I've never been like, "Wow, he's tumultuous as a human."

**Ben:** Right. Right.

**Annie:** But you are so light about this one.

**Ben:** It feels like that. And that's I think that's the-

**Annie:** That's how you're reading too.

**Ben:** Yeah, I mean, it's all coming from that place, which I feel like I never made music that I was like... I was never manufacturing anything. It wasn't, Uh. It feels like a different thing, this one.

**Annie:** People get to hear it this week. It's out this week. I just can't wait to see what it looks like when it works. I am with now. Now you know I'm a little more optimistic as a human all the time-

**Ben:** Sure, right.

**Annie:** ...but I think this one works.

**Ben:** Oh, man, that feels so good.

**Annie:** I mean, I just think it does.

**Ben:** And honestly I've never felt like this—I think it does too—and I have the whole time. I don't know what it working looks like but still, it's just like when you have a good feeling about something. I literally have said that to Greg the whole time. I've been like, "I just think it's going to work, man." This is the first record cycle we've worked together on and I keep being like, "I wish you knew how strange it is." My previous manager, if he hear me saying it, he would be like, "Ben, are you okay?"

**Annie:** I know. When *That Sounds Fun* the book released this year, everyone on my team this was their first book. And I was like, "We don't always hit New York Times, you guys."

**Ben:** Totally.

**Annie:** "This was the first time. It's not always going to be like this." Okay, let's talk for a minute about you playing in the Pro-Am.

**Ben:** Yes. Oh my gosh.

**Annie:** We have to have a little golf talk now that we're a golf pod-

**Ben:** 100%.

**Annie:** ...thanks to Bubba Watson. How did you end up playing in a Pro-Am golf tournament?

**Ben:** So this one is called the AT&T Pro-Am. And it's like the pinnacle of all Pro-Am because it's a PGA event. Essentially, there's a small group of celebrities and they play... Some amateurs are random people, most of them like CEOs of companies.

**Annie:** Right. I was about to say really rich guys somehow get to be Ams

**Ben:** Indeed. I initially thought from the outside, from what they show on TV it seems like it's mostly celebrities. It's not. It's mostly just people and then a few celebrities.

**Annie:** But that's just what they show on TV.

**Ben:** Yes. I mean, maybe they show the other Ams. I don't know. Anyways, I've always been like, "This would be the pinnacle of a golf experience." And it really is. We said this before we started when we were already talking. I've done a number of interesting things, never received so many communications for anything. No TV appearance. No anything.

**Annie:** And you've done big stuff and everybody cared about you being in a golf event.

**Ben:** I didn't look at my phone during the rounds. And I would get back to my phone and it was comical. I was like, "I can't turn these texts." But anyways-

**Annie:** Because you're on National TV live, right?

**Ben:** Yeah. I was not on TV very much. But just people finding out that I was in it were like tracking the scores and whatever. It was really funny.

**Annie:** Who was your pro?

**Ben:** I'll try to tell us quickly. I ended up replacing my... The pro and celebrity we're going to be a guy named Peter Jacobson and it was his last round of competitive

golf. He's 67 and he came back to play in his last AT&T with Huey Lewis, who is like my idol. I replaced Huey Lewis because he tore a... I don't know exactly what. He messed up his shoulder the week before. And I was already coming out there to do a concert for the tournament.

**Annie:** Yes, you and Charles. I saw Charles put it up there.

**Ben:** So I was doing a concert and I was going to play the practice rounds. And then they were like, "You can be first alternate and this is a great way to get the tournament in the future." Which I was like, "Oh my gosh." If I have to go out there and do a concert and play the practice rounds, I was going to do the celebrity one as well, I was like, "Yeah, that's right."

**Annie:** We're a dream.

**Ben:** And if that betters my chances in the future, great. So I'm paired with Peter Jacobsen, the kindest man on planet Earth, a very, very successful... like he's had a killer career. He's big deal. It's his last competitive round. Caddie for him is a guy named Fluff, who's one of the most famous guys in the PGA Tour. He's very old., caddie for Tiger at his height. He was around for that, caddied for everybody.

So then I get word, "This is who you're paired with," and I'm like, "Okay, great. Awesome." I get word that Huey is going to follow us. He's going to walk with us the whole tournament. So basically, my whole-

**Annie:** Oh my gosh.

**Ben:** The other celebrity group was Steve Young the quarterback-

**Annie:** The quarterback, yeah.

**Ben:** ...who I grew up playing Tecmo Super Bowl with Steve Young.

**Annie:** I am again having a fever dream.

**Ben:** Oh, totally. I mean, literally the whole week is just like I hit my shot, and then Huey Lewis who's now like my bro just comes alongside me and we talk until we get to the next shot. It was awesome.

**Annie:** Unbelievable.

**Ben:** I've played in one other event like that. I did the BMW which is like the Korn Ferry. That's the tour below the PGA Tour. It's essentially the minor league.

**Annie:** Korn Ferry.

**Ben:** K-O-R-N. It's a consulting company.

**Annie:** Fascinating! Okay.

**Ben:** It's like the AT&T of the Korn Ferry tour. So I had done one other thing like this. But I've never played competitive golf. So doing it for real, they call it playing your ball down, which means you're not taking any gimmes, you're not hitting any extra shots-

**Annie:** No mulligans?

**Ben:** No mull. You got it.

**Annie:** Thanks.

**Ben:** No mulligans. You're playing tournament golf. It's like you hit a ball out of bounds, it's not go drop a ball. It's retee, hit another one and do it right. So I never played competitive golf. That's a little nerve-wracking.

And then at the AT&T, they're like... I did such a bad job getting content from this, but there are like a zillion people watching. It's like grandstands everywhere.

**Annie:** Oh my gosh.

**Ben:** It was definitely some moments that I was felt nervous in a way that had my heart beating really hard. Like, I've not gotten that in a long time. And when they're like, announcing you on the first tee, "Ben Rector from Nashville, Tennessee," and then it's silence.

**Annie:** Ben!

**Ben:** The people with these TV, like they have the two things they hold up say, "Quiet!" It's like everybody around the tee box holds those up. And I'm just like, "Oh my gosh, I'm going to miss the ball." And I'm like, "Okay, at golf."

**Annie:** You're a very good golfer as a person.

**Ben:** I'm literally having thoughts like, "I could miss it. I could hurt somebody. I could whiff and hit a kid." I don't know.

**Annie:** Oh my gosh. Ben!

**Ben:** It was really awesome. Truly the best I could have ever imagined it going. And it was just such a blessing to be there. It was awesome.

**Annie:** That comparison I made when I saw your stuff on Instagram is I was like,—and you could you're the only one who could tell me yes or no—"Is this like me getting my nails done with Dolly and Reba?"

**Ben:** 100%.

**Annie:** That's what I think. That's what I think. And we just get to talk while we're getting our nails done.

**Ben:** All of us in the group talked about this. It was like a really unique thing that happened because it was the end of Peter's career. I don't know if he will ever do it again. And the other pro that was paired with Steve Young got in on a sponsor's exemption and he's like playing the tournament of his life. He's never competed at that level and he's playing great. We were all together like rooting him on and trying to keep it light. But it was a really weird thing where we all had this moment.

Steve is like, "I've played in this event like eight or nine times." He's like, "I've never had a group like this." It was like summer camp. I feel like we're all like, "This is pretty special." I said this to those guys, I was like, "If you could put me in a time machine and be like, 'Okay, you can pick any group you want to be. You could be in the guy who wins group, you could play with XYZ, whoever,' I was, like, "If I could do it all again, I would choose everything that has happened." It was so much fun.

**Annie:** What a gift.

**Ben:** It was incredible.

**Annie:** That's amazing. It was really cool.

**Annie:** It was fun to watch. Everybody can go back and look on your Instagram because you post a lot of cool pictures and stories from it. I'm ready for you to write out the Huey Lewis experience.

**Ben:** Oh, gosh.

**Annie:** Because you're like, "I'm coming with words about this, but I don't have any yet."

**Ben:** I know. Yeah, yeah.

**Annie:** Now it's like, Oh, I can't wait.

**Ben:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Okay. Is there anything we didn't talk about that you want us to do before?

**Ben:** No. I don't think so. Come see me on tour.

**Annie:** Yes! The tickets are out.

**Annie:** I had a friend text me. I need you to know he texted me the night before your tickets went on sale in Nashville. And he was like, "Are we going?" I was like, "Yeah." So we are coming.

**Ben:** Awesome.

**Annie:** The tour starts when?

**Ben:** It's in May. I don't remember what date.

**Annie:** May and June. I think you're June here. And what's the venue here?

**Ben:** Ascend.

**Annie:** Dude. Yeah, you're not playing the Ryman anymore?

**Ben:** No. We played Ascend once before. And then the last tour I didn't want to straddle venue types which is indoor outdoors. It's hard to bring the right production. And kind of not knowing what COVID would be like, etc, most of the shows are going to tour outdoors, which is going to be fun.



**Annie:** And you have a truck now so you can bring as much as you want.

**Ben:** Oh my gosh.

**Annie:** Your face on the side.

**Ben:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Okay, Ben, because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you?

**Ben:** Oh, man. What sounds fun is getting in a time machine and doing last week all over again.

**Annie:** But honestly, it sounds fun to imagine spring happening in Nashville and getting to be outside. I don't know. At some point. I'll be on the other side of this album and I'll be like, "That's what happened with the album." But right now I'm like, "I don't know what's going to happen." Can't wait.

**Annie:** I hope you feel so proud of this album-

**Ben:** Thanks.

**Annie:** ...and so proud of yourself.

**Ben:** Thank you.

**Annie:** I think we all feel that for you.

**Ben:** Thanks so much. You're really kind.

**Annie:** Well, I mean it. I wouldn't lie to you. I'm very excited for people to get to hear this. Well done.

**Ben:** Thank you.

**Annie:** Well done.

[01:06:29] <music>

**Outro:** You guys, don't you love him? I think the world of Ben Rector. My gracious! Y'all be sure to grab *The Joy of Music* wherever you get your music and follow Ben all over the place on social media so you can tell him thanks so much for being on the show.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie. F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and in Phoenix tonight, and Denver on Wednesday. All the places you may need me, that is how you can find me.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home do something that sounds fun to you. And I will do the same. And today what sounds fun to me, well, you know it, it's tonight in Phoenix and tomorrow. We have a day off passing from Phoenix to Denver. I'm super excited to hang out with our crew for one last day.

So y'all have a great week. I hope I see you tonight or Wednesday out on the road. And we'll see you guys all of you back here on Thursday with some of my very favorite brothers, Joel and Luke Smallbone from for King & Country. We'll see you all then.